

Indiana Department of Environmental Management

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(Text does not include verbatim comments)

Discussion on Children's Environmental Health: Recognizing Indiana Head Start Facilities in the 5-Star Environmental Recognition Program for Child Care

Thank You for the Opportunity to be Here

- Honored to be among people so dedicated to improving children's lives.
- Might seem strange that, as head of IDEM, would address your conference.
- Generally, I work mostly with industries and local governments on their impacts on Indiana's air, land and water.
- However, ***most important resource*** we all protect is not our air, water or land... but, rather, ***our children***.
- So, about three years ago IDEM began working with another kind of business: ***child care facilities***.
- More than ***100,000 Hoosier children*** attend day care in about ***5,200*** registered or licensed ***facilities***.
- 90% of a child's brain develops between birth and age 6: Those who work with pre-school children have a tremendous opportunity to affect a child's future.
- Our children must be provided a safe, nurturing environment to learn, play, and grow in.
- For many Indiana families, that environment is a child care facility.

Part of Building Bright Beginnings Campaign

- Governor Frank O'Bannon and his wife, First Lady Judy O'Bannon, created the ***Building Bright Beginnings Campaign*** with the knowledge of just how important these early years are in a child's life.

- Purpose of Building Bright Beginnings: *encourage each state agency* to look at how they can improve the developmental years of children.
- As an environmental agency, we often deal with environmental threats such as *lead paint, asbestos, mercury and radon*.
- Therefore, we knew we could provide a lot of public education as well as hands on assistance in these areas.
- It's a fact:
- Almost 10 percent of Indiana children have blood lead levels high enough to cause permanent brain damage. Lesser exposures to lead can cause learning disabilities, hyperactivity and impaired hearing.
- Indiana has more than 300 reported cases each year of children exposed to mercury from broken thermometers. Mercury is a nerve toxin that can impair the way we see, hear, walk and talk.
- These threats can have a much *greater detrimental effect on children* because children eat, drink and breathe more per pound than adults.
- It is our goal at IDEM to do our part to protect children from these kinds of environmental threats.

5-Star Environmental Recognition Program

- Started in 1998.
- Indiana is the first state to initiate this type of program.
- Program has received national recognition and many states have adopted parts of our program because they recognize how important it is.
- Facilities earn stars through an *assessment* program for environmental health hazards such as *lead paint, asbestos, carbon monoxide, pesticides and mercury*. In addition, the facilities test for *radon and lead in the water* and set up *recycling programs*. IDEM also considers efforts to deal with *fire safety, energy efficiency and environmental education* when awarding stars.
- More than *70 child care facilities* have received stars since the program began.
- I'm very pleased to announce that *10 are Head Start facilities* and *even more facilities are involved in the Early Head Start Program*.
- *These 10 facilities became involved in our 5-star program mainly through the persistence of 2 women whom I would like to acknowledge today.*

Two Women, One Goal

- Both women I want to recognize today wear many different hats at their facilities: nurse, nutritionist, child counselor, cook, safety coordinator, even staff advisor.
- Yet, they both took it upon themselves to try on one more: environmentalist.
- They *and* the directors of the head starts they work with learned about asbestos and lead paint. They became experts at recycling and sweet-talked their maintenance staffs into recycling fluorescent light bulbs.
They purchased carbon monoxide alarms and mercury spill kits.
They even tested for radon and checked their transformers for PCBs.
They became pest patrollers and worked to eliminate the practice of spraying pesticides at their facilities and have learned more than they wanted to know about roaches and mice.
On top of all that, both have volunteered to reach out to parents at their facilities and asked them to bring mercury thermometers from home to exchange for free digital thermometers!
- Being a 5-star facility is a lot of work. But it's time well spent.
- Participating facilities must truly care about the health of the children for which they care.
- Both *Shannon Howe* and *Lori Brewer* and their *directors* have shown exemplary efforts toward providing a safe and healthy environment for these children to learn and grow in. And for this, I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank Shannon, Lori and their colleagues and publicly acknowledge all their efforts for which we are so grateful.